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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY MONTHLY BRIEFINGS, FEBRUARY 2009

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1. (U) Summary: This is the South African Environment, Science and Technology Monthly Briefings Newsletter, February 2009, Volume 4, Number 2, prepared by the U.S. Embassy Pretoria, South Africa.

Topics of the newsletter:

- DEBATE CONTINUES OVER QUALITY OF DRINKING WATER IN SMALL TOWNS
- DUCK DERBY DROWNED IN SEWAGE
- STUDENTS FLOCK TO US-SPONSORED SCIENCE READING ROOM
- FINANCE MINISTER PROPOSES INCENTIVES FOR ENERGY-EFFICIENT INVESTMENTS
- UN TO DONATE \$11 MILLION FOR GREENING OF 2010 FIFA WORLD CUP
- MINISTER CAUGHT OUT IN THE COLD
- CARBON TRADE FACILITATOR ESTABLISHED
- SOUTH AFRICA HOSTS NANOAFRICA2009
- SOUTH AFRICA LEADS THE WAY IN SAVING ALBATROSS
- VULTURES AT RISK FROM LEAD POISONING
- SMILE - YOU'RE ON CANDID FLAMINGO
- MONTHLY FACTOID

Debate Continues Over Quality of
Drinking Water in Small Towns

2. (U) Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) Deputy Director General of National Water Resources and Infrastructure Cornelius Ruiters warned delegates attending the Implementing Water Allocation Conference that not all drinking water in South Africa is fit to drink. Ruiters said, "There's about an 80 percent chance that most of the water in small towns is still drinkable. Obviously, it would be advisable to know which smaller towns." Ruiters noted that places with "water challenges" included municipalities in the Free State, Limpopo, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and North West provinces. One day later DWAF issued a press release reassuring South Africans that 94 percent of 3,000 samples tested

from South Africa's water supply systems complied with national health standards. DWAF acknowledged that some drinking water might "at times not meet required technical standards." DWAF added that this does not mean that water in these towns is not safe for human consumption. DWAF Head of Drinking Water Quality Leonardo Manus said, "Dr. Ruiters' statistics on the compliance of drinking water quality are unfortunately incorrect." He added that DWAF did have "lower confidence" in the way drinking water is managed in some smaller towns, but not in all of them. He noted that DWAF was expanding its monitoring programs and would monitor "more vigorously" in the coming year. The South African National Consumers Union said Ruiters' statement was a "confirmation that some towns have substandard water." Manus agreed that some municipalities had problems with skills capacity and deterioration of their infrastructure.

Duck Derby Drowned in Sewage

13. (U) Edenvale Rotary had to cancel its annual charity duck derby due to raw sewage pouring into the local Modderfontein Dam. The Duck Derby involves launching 1500 numbered plastic ducks into the Modderfontein River in a race to the finish. Rotary Club Public Relations Officer Bev Frieslich said, "The river is so full of sewage that we had to cancel. We didn't want to put anyone's life in danger. People have to go into the water to get the ducks and children stand near the water to watch." Local Modderfontein resident Nigel Woodward claimed sewage has been flowing into the river for over six months. Woodward added that local residents had been trying to get answers from Johannesburg Water but no one responded to them. Johannesburg Water Spokesman QWater but no one responded to them. Johannesburg Water Spokesman Baldwin Matsimela claims the utility only heard about the problem the day before the cancellation of the race. He advised that they

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would send technicians to investigate the cause of the spillage.

Students Flock to U.S.-sponsored
Science Reading Room

14. (U) Sixty Grade 12 biology students and their teachers from three schools in Mamelodi packed the auditorium in the Mae Jemison U.S. Science Reading Room to hear a presentation on human evolution by Pretoria Girls' High senior biology teacher Mrs. Eugenia Russell. Using a PowerPoint slide show and various primate skulls to illustrate her lecture, Mrs. Russell kept her audience engaged for over an hour. Teachers and students downloaded articles from the Science Reference Center database, and took home copies of recent IIP publications. All participating students enrolled as members of the Reading Room, adding to the growing number of local school children using the books, magazines and Internet resources available at the U.S.-sponsored Mae Jemison Reading Room.

Finance Minister Proposes Incentives for
Energy-Efficient Investments

15. (U) Finance Minister Trevor Manuel proposed incentives for investments in energy-efficient equipment during his February 11, 2009 budget speech. Manuel said these incentives could include supplementary depreciation allowances. Manuel encouraged South African companies to take advantage of the Kyoto Protocols Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), and said the National Treasury would introduce a favorable tax treatment for income from the sale of emission reductions through the CDM. The Minister also noted that the tax on plastic shopping bags would be increased from three to four cents.

UN to Donate \$11 Million for Greening of

¶6. (U) United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon announced that the United Nations would donate R110 million (\$11 million) to South Africa to reduce greenhouse gases during the FIFA World Cup Tournament in 2010. The Secretary General said there would be more vehicles ferrying people and goods around the country, and effective mitigation mechanisms would be needed.

Minister Caught Out in the Cold

¶7. (U) Bad weather trapped Science and Technology Minister Mosibudi Mangena in Antarctica at the South Africa Research Camp where he was attending the opening of a German research station. Mangena visited with the South African National Antarctic Expedition 4, which includes 80 scientists studying geology, weather forecasting, climate change and marine life. He noted that although he had wanted to visit Antarctica for a long time, there are no South African flights. He said, "If you want to go, you have to piggyback and there's always competition for space-even for a minister." Mangena described his visit as "wonderful" despite the minus 30 degree C weather. He said, "At the South African base, you find people wearing Springbok shirts and speaking Afrikaans, Xhosa and Zulu. Our station is well-supplied with electricity generators, vehicles, engineers, doctors and even chefs. I ate the best meal ever - a huge meal of lamb chops, chicken, fish, rice and vegetables."

Carbon Trade Facilitator Established

¶8. (U) The South African Central Energy Fund (CEF) will launch a new hub called CarbonStream Africa (CSA), designed to boost clean energy projects in Africa. CSA, a joint venture with Norway's GreenStream Network, will serve as an advisory company, and will assist international project developers in securing CDM revenue. CSA will facilitate projects such as hydro-to-solar, and wind energy and intends to manage these projects from conception to carbon credit issuance. Africa accounts for a little more than two percent of the estimated US \$120 billion global carbon market. CSA CEO Devan Pillay said, "Although lagging behind, African nations are in a position to benefit from the rapid expansion of the global carbon markets and the increasing demand for Carbon Emission Reductions".

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South Africa Hosts NanoAfrica2009

¶9. (U) South Africa hosted the third NanoAfrica conference in February 2009. NanoAfrica2009 focused on the latest developments and future trends in nano-science and nanotechnology. The South African National Nanotechnology Strategy identified six "focus areas" for nanotechnology research in South Africa: chemicals and bioprocessing; energy; health; materials and manufacturing; mining and minerals; and water. Minister of Science and Technology Mangena said he was "satisfied" with South Africa's "relatively early" adoption and progress on nanotechnology.

South Africa Leads the Way in Saving Albatross

¶10. (U) South Africa Albatross Task Force (SAATF) member Meridad Goren met with the U.K.'s Prince Charles in London to discuss South Africa's measures to protect albatross. The South African Task Force, an initiative led by Birdlife International and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), was the first international scheme to place specialized instructors in fishing

vessels. When the initiative was launched, approximately 20,000 albatross per year were dying in South African waters after becoming entangled in fishing lines or hooked by fishing gear. RSPB Conservation Spokesman Grahame Madge said the problem had been exacerbated by the industrialization of fisheries, new technology and the rise of trawler fishing.

¶11. (U) Regulations sponsored by the SAATF were introduced in 2008 limiting sea bird catch to 25 birds per longline vessel in local waters. Goren noted that 85 percent of the albatross were now being saved. Goren added that compliance with regulations has "improved dramatically" with 95 percent of the fishing vessels complying with seabird regulations. South Africa Tuna Longline Association Chairman Don Lucas said, "There is greater awareness among fishers about the seabirds, but more research is needed on mitigation measures." He noted: "Birds target the bait on the hooks, which means fishers cannot catch the targeted fish" He added, "We need to ensure the targeted fish are caught so that operations can be profitable, but the fishery needs to be developed without causing the unintended death of these beautiful birds."

Vultures at Risk from Lead Poisoning

¶12. (U) The WWF-sponsored Vulture Evaluation Project has issued a landmark study indicating that South Africa's vultures are at risk from lead poisoning from ingesting the bullets farmers use to kill livestock found in "vulture restaurants." The De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust defines a vulture restaurant "as a specific site where animal carcasses are provided as an artificial source for vultures to provide a feeding haven for vultures." Vultures are quite specific about what they eat, dining only on dead animals, which means livestock must be a slaughtered (or already) dead before being placed in the "restaurant." The purpose of the study, conducted on 150 captive and wild vultures, was to determine whether or not lead is in the vultures' food chain. Veterinary pharmacologist Vinny Naidoo noted that some wild birds had levels high enough to be classified as chronically exposed, i.e., having Qhigh enough to be classified as chronically exposed, i.e., having long term exposure to higher-than-normal lead levels. Naidoo says the findings reveal that farmers and restaurant managers will have to be "advised on the importance of removing bullets before placing dead animals on the menu at the restaurant."

Smile - You're on Candid Flamingo

¶13. (U) A new webcam allows the world to watch breeding antics of the 20,000 lesser flamingos located on Kamfers Dam's artificial flamingo breeding island. The equipment tilts, pans and zooms, allowing close up shots of chicks hatching and parents feeding them. Infra red lights permit viewing 24 hours a day. The artificial breeding island is the first such structure in the world and was funded and constructed by Kapa Mining in 2006. Lesser flamingos produced 9000 chicks on the island in 2008 and more chicks are anticipated in 2009. Birdlife South Africa Executive Director Mark Ander says that Kamfers Dam is the only breeding locality for lesser flamingos in South Africa and one of only four in all Africa. The website can be found at www.africam.com.

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Monthly Factoid

¶14. (U) 220 000 years ago a meteorite struck South Africa, forming the Tswaing Crater northwest of Pretoria. This is one of the most accessible and best-preserved meteorite impact craters in the world.

La Lime